Prologue

In *Chapters of Erie,* that pointed commentary on American business ethics, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., viewed with alarm the organized lawlessness that had grown up in this country since Appomattox, sheltered by the mantle of the law. The problem was not the ex-soldier, trained to kill, but rather the ex-administrator, who for the first time controlled the destinies of large numbers of men and large amounts of capital. Adams felt that the evil geniuses were "certain single men at the head of vast combinations of private wealth," and after delineating a general type of war-propelled millionaires, he selected two—Jay Gould and Jim Fisk—as specific examples. These speculators, under the guise of benefitting communities, had established networks of railroads without any regard for genuine need. Lines were promoted in regions where there was no competition, so that exorbitant rates could be charged. When these ventures proved unsuccessful, the speculators unloaded their securities on the residents of the towns the lines were supposed to serve, thereby relieving themselves of the obligation of paying for their mistakes.[1]

The activities of Gould and Fisk were typical of railroad financ-

ing. Fattened on government land grants and monopoly routes, the railroads tracked across the continent at a pace that astounded even their most ardent promoters. In 1850, only 2,201 miles of track were in use, but during the next ten years, this figure more than tripled. In the four years between 1869 and 1873 alone, more than 24,000 miles were built. By 1877, the railroad network consisted of over 79,000 miles. Overall, the industry represented an investment of almost $5 billion, nearly half of which ($2.26 billion) consisted of bonded debt. By way of comparison, the national debt that same year stood at $2.1 billion.

About fifty corporations, each operating between two hundred and a thousand miles of road, made up the bulk of the nation's railway system. Of them, the Pennsylvania stood first and was the nation's greatest single private enterprise. Capitalized in 1873 at $39 million, it owned, operated, or otherwise controlled 6,600 miles of line and employed about 200,000 men. No other industry in the country even approached this scale of operation.

The railroads were not only the country's largest businesses; they were fast becoming economically indispensable. All land transportation of persons and goods, except that of a purely local nature, went by rail. By the 1870s the railroads had overtaken canals and natural waterways as carriers of the nation's freight. As early as 1871, only 34 percent of the total freight tonnage passing through St. Louis was carried on the Mississippi River; by 1877, the figure had dropped to 10 percent. In 1872, the 10 million tons of freight carried by the Erie and New York Central railroads to New York City was nearly three times the 3.7 million tons borne over the Erie Canal. Four-fifths of all the grain received at eastern seaports in 1876 came by rail. In the same year, nearly all passengers, the nation's mail, its troops and their supplies, and from perhaps two-thirds to three-fourths of all freight—indeed most of the nation's commerce—moved over the railroad network.

Although several adherents of the "new economic history" argue that the railroads were not indispensable to American growth, it would be difficult to find anyone at that time who shared this

view. The *Chicago Tribune* echoed contemporary opinion in an editorial entitled "The Value of Railroad Transportation" in its issue of July 23, 1877. It called the railroad system "the very heart and life of the modern system of commercial existence." Henry Poor, publisher of *Poor's Manual for Railroads,* went as far as to say that it was responsible for feeding the entire population of the United States.[2]

But as the railroads expanded, so, too, did their economic power. Entire regions lay in their grip. Communities either flourished or disappeared at their whim. The railroad companies frequently owned the coal fields and the iron mines. In some states, they were in complete control of the political machinery, and they were notorious for their rapport with high federal officials.[3] Railroad promoters and lobbyists swarmed into the state houses and the halls of Congress in search of charters, franchises, subsidies, and land grants, while fighting to prevent investigations, regulation, and new taxes. They were almost perpetually at war with the farmers and small-town merchants, who justifiably feared the power of the railroads to destroy their economic operations. They were always seeking legislative favors, offering as inducements the free pass, the political contribution, and, on occasion, the outright bribe. They also held out such considerations as legal fees to be paid, construction contracts to be let, and a variety of positions to be filled. In almost every community, they had at their beck and call a veritable army of talented attorneys, whose livelihood depended on the railroads. When these "railroad lawyers" later became judges, legislators, governors, or cabinet members, they carried their pro-railroad points of view with them into their new positions. As Clifton K. Yearley, Jr., notes in his study of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad: "Merely in the process of operating the road its president exerted influence as great as that of any other individual in Maryland."[4]

Even presidents of the United States sometimes owed their election directly to railroad political influence. An outstanding example of this was the disputed election of 1876 between Republican Rutherford B. Hayes and Democrat Samuel J. Tilden. The dispute cen-

tered on the voting in Louisiana, Florida, and South Carolina, where state election boards, dominated by Republicans and buttressed by federal troops, alleged fraud and intimidation of Black voters and threw out enough Democratic votes to create Republican majorities. Historians generally agree that the Louisiana and South Carolina elections were too corrupt to be even understood by ordinary human beings, but that Tilden did carry Florida, and its electoral votes would have assured him of the presidency. However, the election was decided in Hayes's favor by a special electoral commission set up by Congress, and its decision was accepted largely because of the defection of southern Democrats from Tilden to Hayes. The actual determination was made by Thomas A. Scott, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, who, in return for assurances of support for a Texas Pacific Railroad, obtained the votes of the southern congressmen for Hayes.[5] It is hardly an accident that on March 2, 1877, when Hayes received the telegram confirming his election, he was en route to Washington in Tom Scott's own luxurious private car.[6] The *New York Sun* had good reason to ascribe "Mr. Hayes' residence in the White House" to "the Texas Pacific enterprise" and "Col. Scott's influence."[7]

As for the other principal force in the railroad industry—the workmen—they had little power, either economic or political. Railroad workers had conducted militant struggles against the companies since the first strike on the roads, which was on the Baltimore & Ohio and lasted from June 20 to 30, 1831,[8] but these had always been sporadic outbursts and never resulted in the establishment of effective unions. In fact, as late as 1873 the railwaymen had almost no unions at all. The track hands, switchmen, and brakemen were entirely without unions. A small number of machinists employed in certain repair shops belonged to the Machinists' and Blacksmiths' International Union, but the majority of the shopmen and stationary hands were without a union of any kind. A minority of skilled workers were organized according to function into three brotherhoods: The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, and the Brotherhood of Railway

Conductors, but the last two hardly operated as unions. The Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen had been founded for "the protection and elevation mentally, morally and socially" of all firemen "for the purpose of working their way up to a higher position," and the organization placed its entire emphasis on its membership's proper moral conduct as the way to achieve improvements in their conditions. The *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine*, the Brotherhood's official journal, stressed the continued uplift of members through self-education in railroad technology, the rooting out of intemperance and loose moral conduct, and the protection of railroad workers' families through sick benefits and death insurance. Judging from the statements of its leadership and the pages of its official journal, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen devoted more time to screening the railroad corporations' personnel than to representing them. "It is part of our business to secure all good members work," the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine* editorialized, "and the many assurances from railroad officers that they will give us the preference is, in itself, a work of honor to us as locomotive firemen. . . . To place such men upon the locomotive engine as have received their education through the order, is merely to give the public a class of men who trust can be reposed in."[9]

Only one effective union existed among the railroad workers in 1873: the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, with a membership of 10,000 employed on nearly every major trunk line, with well-enforced written contracts on a number of lines, with a lively monthly magazine, and with a well-managed accident and insurance program. But the Brotherhood was led by Grand Chief Engineer Charles Wilson, a conservative trade unionist who would not countenance the idea that union engineers should cooperate with other, nonrailroad workers in joint actions on economic and political issues. Even on issues affecting the engineers, Wilson opposed strikes. Instead, he stressed that workers and employers shared a common interest, and let it be known that local lodges could not strike without his permission or they would be expelled. Under Wilson's leadership, the Brotherhood worked closely with the

American Railway Association, an employers' organization.

There was hardly any recognition of the unions by the railroad companies for purposes of collective bargaining. Sometimes, as in the case of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, companies negotiated wages and work rules for the sake of convenience, or out of necessity, but never as a matter of right, and always with the thought in mind of abrogating the agreements when it suited their purposes.[10]

The fact that there was no effective railroad unionism should not be taken to mean that there was any lack of grievances on the part of the railwaymen. The official organ of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers put it succinctly in the form of a question:

> Are not railway employees in this year of grace, 1873, enduring a tyranny compared with which British taxation in colonial days was as nothing, and of which the crack of the slave whip is only a fair type?[11]

The facts substantiated this conclusion, and as the depression deepened, they grew even starker. It was not unusual for a railroad worker to be unemployed, and therefore unpaid, for as many as four days of the week, while the company expected him to be prepared to work at all times. When the men were able to work, they were often required to "lay over" at high-priced company hotels at the opposite end of the line until they could find a job that took them home. The alternative was to pay one's own fare back on a company passenger train at the regular rates, because most companies did not issue free passes. (One worker on the Lake Shore line in Collinwood, Ohio, was paid sixteen cents in wages to take a train to Cleveland, but then had to report back to his superior at Collinwood at a cost of twenty-five cents in fare.) Workers who paid seventy-five cents a day for board and food while waiting for return trains—and they often had to wait from two to four days—had nothing to show for their work upon their return. Indeed, they often ended up in debt, and when they finally fell so far into debt that their wages

were garnisheed, they were forthwith discharged.

At the end of a month, the average railroad worker, with the exception of engineers, took home a little more than half of what he would have made had he been able to work the full thirty days. The average wage of a brakeman or fireman on four major eastern trunk lines in the spring of 1877 was $1.99 per trip, which would have netted him $59.70 if he had worked thirty trips per month. Yet, because of the lack of work, the average brakeman or fireman took home only $30.00 per month, or $10.50 less than the average unskilled worker. A worker on the Baltimore & Ohio described his condition and that of his fellow workers:

> We eat our hard bread and tainted meat two days old on the sooty cars up the road, and when we come home, find our children gnawing bones and our wives complaining that they cannot even buy hominy and molasses for food.[12]

To add to this, wages were paid at irregular intervals, and workingmen had to wait as long as three months to receive their pay. The Erie Railroad, for example, frequently waited six or eight weeks before paying its employees. The same company, however, did not hesitate to demand that its trackmen, who lived in company shanties along the side of the tracks, should pay ground rent of $20 to $25 a year or vacate their homes. Some companies made their workmen trade in company-owned stores, where prices were higher and the quality poorer than in nearby establishments.[13]

By a dozen different stratagems, the railroads forced their workmen to perform unpaid labor. Engine hostlers were eliminated, and firemen were obliged to spend a couple of hours cleaning the engine each trip, for which they were not paid. Engineers and firemen on the Pennsylvania system were compelled to pay the repair cost on engines, regardless of the cause. "If you don't pay the damages," complaining engineers were told, "we'll discharge you." Many engineers lost as much as three months of work every year because company officials did not supply them with new engines while their

cabs were being repaired. In addition, engineers were paid only for the time they operated the engine. "If I fall sick and am even absent for an hour from the engine I am docked the time," complained one engineer, "while the company can throw me off just as many hours as they choose." "We get paid so much a day for every day we are on a run," said another. "They pay us by the run, not by the day. . . . A day is twelve hours and from our point of view there are fourteen days in the week."[14] A reporter for the *New York Times* explained:

> The time figured upon the schedule of trains by no means represents the time required of them [the engineers] as a day's work. There are numberless things required when they are not on the road. The general care of the locomotive, the keeping in order of the headlights, the packing of the boxes, etc., devolve upon them, and consume a great deal of time. Many necessary failures in making regular trips, chargeable in no way to the men, are counted against them as if the fault were not the road's fault. They also suffer great loss, as they are kept idle while their engines undergo repair in the work shops.[15]

Railroading in the 1870s was a far more hazardous occupation than it is today; most of the safety devices now in use were either unknown then, or else little used and in imperfect form. It was still the era of the clumsy handbrake, which threw so many railroaders to their death, and of the treacherous link-and-pin coupling, which maimed so many more. Crews were constantly being reduced, and at a time when trains were controlled entirely by manual means, this meant added dangers. And the railroad executives seldom offered their maimed employees more than sympathy. Nor did the courts, which began to view labor as a commodity whose value was determined in the marketplace. In the case of a railroad worker who claimed that his employer was liable for injuries suffered on the job, the court ruled that since wages for railroad workers were higher than the average, there was no liability. The market itself compensated for increased risk.[16]

When to all this is added the railroad companies' arbitrary classification of engineers and firemen—men with long experience often received lower wages than those just hired—and their discriminatory promotion policies, the desperation felt by the workers is understandable. And to cap the climax came a series of wage cuts during the great depression of the 1870s—which was, itself, to a considerable extent the result of railroad overexpansion following the Civil War, and of the wild speculation and ruinous rate wars in which the private empires of the railroad tycoons battled each other.

The failure of the banking house of Jay Cooke & Company on September 18, 1873, ushered in six long and terrible lean years for the American working class. By 1875, there were as many as three million unemployed, and two-fifths of those employed were working no more than six or seven months a year, while less than one-fifth worked regularly. The wages of those still working had been cut as much as 45 percent, often to little more than a dollar a day.[17]

During the grim years from 1873 to 1877, the post–Civil War pace of railroad construction was brought to an abrupt halt. While over 34,000 miles of track were laid between 1865 and 1873, only 6,000 miles were laid between 1873 and 1877—a decline of more than 50 percent in the rate of construction. Moreover, in the four years after 1873, railroads defaulted on over eight hundred million dollars in bonds, and the value of their stocks dropped to half of what it had been in 1872. During the one-month period from September 15 to October 15, 1873, the usually stable stock of the New York Central & Hudson River Company dropped twenty-one points, signifying a loss of nineteen million dollars. Every January, Henry Poor published figures showing the decrease in dividends from one year to the next: from 1874 to 1875, the reduction was $5,638,720; from 1875 to 1876, it was $6,254,540; and from 1876 to 1877, it was $9,483,356. By July 1877, no dividends were being paid on any railroad in Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Kansas, Mississippi, Missouri, Nebraska, Oregon, Texas, or Vermont.

Still, many major railroad companies continued to pay dividends throughout the depression. The New York Central paid 8 percent

in cash dividends in 1873 and 1874, and 10 percent in 1875, while the Pennsylvania and the Baltimore & Ohio paid 10 percent every year from 1873 to 1876. These and other railroad companies did not hesitate to pass the burden of their financial losses on to their employees, instead of to their stockholders. Between 1873 and 1877, railroad workers suffered reductions in their wages ranging on the average between 21 and 37 percent, while food prices dropped only 5 percent. John Garrett, president of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, lowered the wages of his men to 50 percent of what they had formerly been; yet not once did he either lower a dividend payment or fail to make one.[18]

Railroad workers were not even given adequate advance notice of impending wage cuts. Officials of the East Tennessee, Virginia & Georgia Railroad told their workers of a 20 percent wage cut a day before it went into effect. The Pennsylvania Railroad did not even bother to notify the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers that wages were to be cut, despite the existence of a written agreement between the company and the union stipulating that the wage scale could not be altered by either side without prior notice or joint consultation. When the union sent a special committee to J.M. McCullough, the system's western superintendent, to express the Brotherhood's protest, McCullough fired its members and issued an order forbidding leaves of absence to other engineers who sought to discuss the matter with him. And when enraged engineers threatened to strike, McCullough, well aware of the thousands of unemployed railroad men, replied bluntly: "Strike and be ------."[19]

Other rail officials echoed this callous viewpoint. The superintendent of the Harlem division of the New York Central lines told reporters that "if the engineers should strike, their places could be easily supplied, and the public not feel the change."[20]

Nevertheless, strike the railroad workers did—in a series of outbursts between November 1873 and July 1874. On over eighteen railroads—the East Tennessee, Virginia & Georgia; the Philadelphia & Reading; the Pennsylvania Central; the New Jersey Southern; the New York & Oswego Midland; the various eastern divisions of the

Erie railroad system; the Boston & Worcester; the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western; the Louisville Short Line; the Allegheny Valley; and the Chicago & Alton—workers walked off their jobs for a period of a week or two in opposition to the wage cuts, demanding the wages due them, and opposing such employer practices as blacklisting and the ironclad oaths.[21]

While the 1873–74 strikes were neither as dramatic nor as important as the nationwide railroad strike in 1877, in several respects they foreshadowed the violent outburst three years later. For one thing, they revealed that although the railroad workers were mostly without trade union organization or experience, they had the power to disrupt traffic on many roads. Newspapers told of workers removing coupling pins from many freight cars so that they could not be moved; of workers tearing up sections of track, disabling locomotives, and cutting telegraph wires; of notches tampered with and water tanks ruined; of coaches and freight cars uncoupled; of nonstrikers pulled from cabs; of engines and boilers tampered with; and of soap placed in tanks from which the locomotives took water, "rendering the water unfit for making steam."[22]

Then, too, in every community affected by the walkouts, there was widespread sympathy for the railroad strikers. A dispatch to the *New York Times* from Pottsville, Pennsylvania, describing the strike on the coal trains of the Philadelphia & Reading Railroad against a 10 percent reduction in wages, noted that even though the miners were thrown out of work by the stoppage of all transportation, "they seem to sympathize with them [the railroad workers], thus making the movement stronger and more important than it otherwise would be."[23] Community support for the strikers expressed itself in many ways. Nonstriking workers brought provisions to the strikers; local trade unions passed resolutions praising the strikers' "pluck against acts of tyranny" and urging them "to resist the unjust demands of this [railroad] monopoly to the bitter end"; in a few instances, they voted funds for the relief of the men on strike. Among the nonlaboring population as well, there was substantial backing for the strikers, which reflected the widespread

resentment against the stranglehold the railroads had on the economic life of the nation. In fact, when militias were sent to put down "violence" by strikers, they met so hostile a reception from local citizens that they let it be known that they wanted to go home. When Governor John Hartranft of Pennsylvania agreed to send troops against the Erie strikers, leading local citizens in Scranton, including a justice of the peace, a town burgess, an assistant postmaster, and a physician, publicly assailed his decision. A petition signed by a majority of the city's prominent residents charged Hartranft with "supporting the interests of a corporation against our own citizens who ask nothing but their hard-earned wages." The petitioners asked him to withdraw the soldiers "in the name of humanity." Moreover, after the state troops arrived, many merchants refused to sell them provisions, and some soldiers suffered "for want of food." A prominent officer in the state militia told Governor Hartranft that the strikers had "the sympathy of nearly if not all the Citizens of the town." He could have added the members of the militia as well, for many of the militiamen were reported to be in sympathy with the strikers.[24]

The 1873–74 strikes foreshadowed the great uprising of 1877 in still another way. Despite popular support, the strikers of 1873–74 were unable to win any of their demands. The sympathy of the people counted for naught when massive unemployment made it possible for the railroad managers to bring in new workers. And where this proved insufficient to break a strike, the state militia did the job for the railroads, over the protests of prominent citizens and even of militiamen who sympathized with the strikers. In cases where the local militia could not be trusted, soldiers and even police from towns miles away were brought in. A detachment of St. Louis police traveled over a hundred miles to Moberly, to put down the strike of engineers and firemen.[25] In the case of the Erie shopmen's strike, economic coercion was added to military and police power. The company let it be known that unless the men returned on its terms, the shops would be moved to Elmira, New York. A number of businessmen thereupon deserted the strikers and lined up behind the company. "They see," explained the *Scranton Republican*, "that

unless they keep the shops running their business will be ruined."[26]

The railroad managers were not content to simply defeat the strikers. All of them refused to rehire the strike leaders, and sent their names "through the length and breadth of the country." Representatives of twenty southern companies went further and decided not to rehire workers guilty of "interference with others willing to work." They then drew up a list of proscribed workers and circulated it throughout the region.[27]

In addition to blacklists, the railroads instituted the ironclad oath on a wide scale. In most cases, before workers could return, they had to pledge never to join a union or go out on strike. Newspapers featured the following dispatch from Knoxville, Tennessee:

> Late strikers of East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Railway, including engineers, machinists and blacksmiths have withdrawn from their Unions. Engineers in a published card acknowledge their error and say they have determined to withdraw from the organization known as Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. Machinists and Blacksmiths also signed a published card to same effect, withdrawing from the Society, and Blacksmith's Union. In tomorrow's *Daily Press and Herald* Vice President Jaques publishes the following to the public: "To prevent any misapprehension as to the true position of the engineers on the East Tennessee, Virginia and Georgia Railway I will state that they have withdrawn from the organization known as the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and the charter of the Knoxville Division No. 115, has been delivered to me to be forwarded to Charles Wilson, Grand Chief Engineer, Cleveland, Ohio.

An ironclad oath signed by twenty-two railroad engineers read in part:

> We now acknowledge that we have been beaten and that we were in error. . . . We have withdrawn from the organization known as the "Brotherhood of Engineers," and if you think it

> proper to employ us again, we will work for you as faithfully as we ever did before, notwithstanding the reduction in wages.[28]

Despite the setbacks they had suffered, the engineers emerged from their 1873–74 strike struggles stronger and even more militant than before. They were enraged by Grand Chief Engineer Wilson's strikebreaking role during the strikes on the East Tennessee, Virginia & Georgia Railroad and on the Pennsylvania line, and they succeeded in removing him from office by the nearly unanimous vote of delegates to a special Brotherhood convention. "Reform" candidate Peter M. Arthur replaced Wilson, and pledged a militant response to any effort of the arrogant management to demand further concessions from the engineers.[29]

This new policy paid off. In October 1876, the Brotherhood won a victory over the Central of New Jersey by forcing the company to rescind a wage cut. Two months later, it defeated the Grand Trunk Railway of Canada when that line violated its agreements and dismissed the Brotherhood's leaders. On December 29, 1876, the engineers stopped every train west of Montreal and completely closed the single track road. While sympathizers held the roundhouses, strikebreakers were turned back. On January 3, 1877, the Grand Trunk yielded, reinstated the dismissed Brotherhood leaders, and even reimbursed Grand Chief Engineer Arthur for travel expenses he had incurred during the strike.[30]

It must be kept in mind that these victories over the Jersey Central and Grand Trunk took place at the very depth of the depression. In 1877, the number of unemployed rose to a peak of perhaps five million—with a population less than one-third of that today. Many of the jobless drifted across America, with no means of support except occasional charity; they lived in shacks and searched the garbage heaps for food. John McIntosh, the socialist poet, summed up conditions in his ballad, "The Tramp":

> We canvassed the city through and through,
> Nothing to work at, nothing to do;

> The wheels of the engines go no more,
> Bolted and barred is the old shop door;
> Grocers look blue over unpaid bills,
> Paupers increase and the poorhouse fills.[31]

A correspondent wrote to the *New Orleans Daily Picayune:*

> Mr. Editor, God only knows what will become of our poor workingmen who have families or even single men, who are out of employment by thousands in our city; if something soon don't turn up to give relief. Sir, if you believe me, death is staring us in the face. . . . My family are, at this time, without the food necessary to keep life together. It is hard to be compelled to starve in this plentiful world; I cannot find any employment to provide the requisite food to sustain life. I am willing to perform any occupation that my strength will permit me so as to enable me to get food for my suffering family.[32]

Those lucky enough to work saw their wages drop as multitudes waited to do their jobs for even less. A Cincinnati cigar worker with a wife and three children was asked how he lived on earnings of $5 a week. "I don't live," he replied. "I am literally starving. We get meat once a week, the rest of the week we have dry bread and black coffee."[33]

Unlike the crises of 1837 and 1857, the long depression of the 1870s did not wipe out the labor movement, but organized labor was in a state of considerable disarray. Of thirty national unions in existence at the time of the panic, only nine remained by the spring of 1877, with a total membership of about fifty thousand—a negligible fraction of the total nonagricultural working population. Everywhere, local unions and trades' assemblies faded away, and employers took advantage of the situation by initiating vigorous anti-union drives that further decimated the ranks of the unions.[34]

Under these circumstances, it is understandable that victories such as those scored by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers

stood out in bold relief. With a membership listed at 14,000 in 192 branches,[35] with its treasury well-filled and its mutual insurance system the best of any union's, the Brotherhood seemed to be the only bright spot in an otherwise gloomy labor picture.

Its confidence restored, the Brotherhood next took on the Boston & Maine. Early in 1876, that railroad had cut wages 10 percent for all its employees. However, when the road ended the year with a surplus after paying stockholders the usual 6 percent dividend, and on top of this raised the salaries of its president and superintendent in January 1877, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers demanded a raise of 10 cents per day for the road's sixty-seven engineers. The request was contemptuously rejected, and on February 12, after a four-hour ultimatum, the Brotherhood's engineers stopped trains wherever they happened to be.

Once again, the pattern of 1873–74 proceeded to unfold. Public sympathy was expressed for the strikers; commuters even told reporters that they would rather walk than see the men defeated. The company recruited strikebreakers from crowds of unemployed; the Boston police came at the railway's bidding and cleared the Boston & Maine's station of strike sympathizers. In the end, the Brotherhood ran out of money; the striking engineers were all replaced by scabs, and the strikers were blacklisted throughout the industry.[36]

Encouraged by the defeat handed to the Brotherhood by the Boston & Maine, the railroad corporations set out to completely destroy the one union that still operated effectively in the industry. A campaign was launched to picture the Brotherhood as a dangerous enemy to public peace and safety, and, with the railroad lobby in full gear, laws were passed in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, and Michigan making it a criminal offense for an engineer to abandon his train "at any place other than the scheduled or otherwise appointed destination. . . ." Charles Francis Adams, then head of the Massachusetts Board of Railroad Commissioners, became so consumed by the desire to destroy the Brotherhood that he sent out a resounding appeal to the country's railroad presidents to cooperate in smash-

ing the union. "The Brotherhood," he wrote, ". . . has got to be broken up. . . . It has become a mere common nuisance . . . a standing public menace. . . . The only question is how to proceed so as to break it up most quietly and most effectually."

At least one railroad president took his advice immediately. Franklin B. Gowen, president of the Philadelphia & Reading, gave his engineers the alternative of remaining with the company and leaving the Brotherhood, or of remaining with the Brotherhood and leaving the company. Those who stayed with the Reading might, if they chose, enjoy the benefits of a proposed company-managed insurance system in place of that operated by the Brotherhood. All the money an employee paid in, however, could be forfeited if he quit his job or went on strike.[37]

Gowen, of course, needed neither the Boston & Maine nor Charles Francis Adams to teach him how to break a union. He made a deliberate, concerted, and successful attempt to destroy the first important union in the coal fields—the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, formed after much difficulty in the Schuylkill and Lehigh regions of Pennsylvania in 1867, and uniting a working force made up of various nationalities: Americans, Germans, Irish, English, Welsh, and Scots. Gowen succeeded in destroying "the old WBA"—as it was nostalgically called—by stockpiling coal and then shutting the mines dependent upon his railroad, with the cooperation of other operators, for more than six months in 1874–75—an event known as the "Long Strike."[38] He then followed up the defeat of the union with a fierce, vindictive prosecution of various militant miners whom he succeeded in branding as organized terrorist groups, known as "Molly Maguires," and whom he connected with coal unionism.

Twenty miners went to the gallows in the wake of the "Long Strike," after being convicted in trials that took place in an atmosphere of religious, social, and economic bigotry, and that lacked even the elements of due process. They were prosecuted by Gowen and General Albright, who wore his full military regalia to emphasize his patriotism. The fate of the doomed miners was preordained by a rabid press and by designating juries that excluded Catholics.

In his study, *From the Molly Maguires to the United Mine Workers,* Harold W. Aurand writes:

> The Molly Maguire investigation and trials were one of the most astounding surrenders of sovereignty in American history. A private corporation initiated the investigation through a private detective agency; a private police force arrested the alleged offenders; the coal company attorneys prosecuted them. The state provided only the courtroom and the hangman.[39]

Even though "reform" Grand Chief Engineer Arthur had already demonstrated the conservative pattern that was to characterize his twenty-five-year reign as head of the Brotherhood by preventing thirteen potential strikes by its members in 1876, he decided that it was necessary to mobilize the Brotherhood's full resources to meet Gowen's new challenge to unionism, and supported the Philadelphia & Reading engineers when they voted to strike. When the Reading's superintendent turned down a request for arbitration, the Brotherhood called a strike for midnight on Saturday, April 14, 1877. Half of the Reading's engineers quit work, taking care first to bring their trains to their destination, since a new law had just been passed in Pennsylvania punishing the obstruction or abandonment of trains.[40]

The Brotherhood suffered a serious defeat, as Gowen hired any unemployed worker ready to try his hand at running an engine in order to stave off starvation. Although the pile of burned-out engines and wrecked cars mounted, within a week, trains were running again. Its treasury almost exhausted, the Brotherhood called off the strike.[41]

On June 21, 1877, Gowen's triumph was complete: the first ten of the "Molly Maguires" were hanged in pairs.[42]

On April 9, 1877, the *New York Times* editorialized jubilantly:

> The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers is destroyed as a dictatorial body; neither railroad nor engineer will fear it hence-

> forth or regard its ukases. . . . Both steps in the action of the Reading Company—the stand against the union and the plan of substitution as to its benefits—are an example which should be imitated by employers generally.

The Reading's insurance plan was not the only antilabor device initiated by the railroads. Around the middle of May 1877, representatives of the four great eastern trunk lines (companies that had through routes between Chicago and various eastern points) met in Chicago and concluded a pooling agreement—the first of its kind—to end the rate war that had been increasing in intensity since 1874.[43] Although Thomas Scott, president of the Pennsylvania Railroad, later denied it, it became clear that the agreement also included a decision to reduce the wages of the railroad workers by at least another 10 percent.[44]

On May 15, the Missouri Pacific led the way by cutting engineers' pay by 12 percent. Nine days later, the Pennsylvania followed up by announcing a 10 percent reduction to take effect June 1 for all employees earning more than a dollar a day—the second such cut since the onset of the great crisis. At the same time, the Pennsylvania ordered that freight trains be made up of thirty-four cars instead of seventeen—the dreaded "doubleheaders." Other lines—the Lehigh Valley Railroad, the Lackawanna, the Michigan Southern, the Indianapolis & St. Louis, the Vandalia, the New York Central & Hudson River, and the Northern Central—also ordered a 10 percent reduction in wages for July 1. Only three roads—the Baltimore & Ohio, the Northern Pacific, and the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy—did not immediately join the wage-cutting drive. They waited until after July 1.[45]

The notices threw the railroad workers, already earning barely enough to support their families, into utter despair. In an appeal to the managers of the Pennsylvania, the railwaymen pleaded:

> We respectfully call your attention to our grievances, in connection with your road, on which many of us have been em-

> ployed for years. Our wages have been from time to time reduced, so that many of us do not earn an average of 75 cents per day. We have sympathized fully with your directors in all their past efforts to further the interests of your company, and accepted the situation so long as it guaranteed us a bare living, but in the last move was guaranteed to many of us a pauper's grave. . . .[46]

A grievance committee of thirty railwaymen met with President Scott in his Philadelphia office and presented their plea to him. But Scott argued that the railroad was actually being kept in operation "simply that men might be employed," without even "an iota of profit to the owners." The committee thereupon decided to accept the latest wage cut.[47] Except for about one hundred longshoremen employed by the Pennsylvania at its New York docks, who walked out in protest against the June 1 cut (which brought their wages down to thirteen and a half cents an hour), the workers on all the lines accepted the pay cuts without quitting their jobs. And the longshoremen returned to work after three weeks, accepting a compromise offer of fourteen cents an hour. The railroad managers could nod agreement at the statement in the *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* that "this year [1877] . . . labor is under control for the first time since the war."[48]

What neither the managers nor the *Chronicle* yet knew was that some railroad workers were secretly organizing to fight back. Immediately after the Pennsylvania Railroad announced its wage cut, the trainmen on the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago (a subsidiary of the Pennsylvania) began talking of the need for a new organization "to get the trainmen—composing engineers, conductors, brakemen, and firemen, in the three grand trunk lines of the country—into one solid body." Only a short time before they met, the engineers on the railroad had struck and left their locomotives, but had been defeated when the firemen took their places. Such a lack of labor unity, they were determined, had to be remedied immediately if the railroad workers were not to be completely trampled underfoot by a united management.[49]

On Saturday evening, June 2, 1877, the talk became a reality when a group of men on the road met at Dietrich's Hall in Allegheny City, across the river from Pittsburgh, and formed the Trainmen's Union, a secret, oathbound organization. The founders knew that the three grand trunk lines were going through with the wage cuts; they were convinced that the only way to defeat them was "to combine into one body all the men." They decided that after they had succeeded in organizing three-fourths of the railroaders, and should the "railroad magnates" not accede to their demands by rescinding the wage cut and the doubleheader policy, and by resolving long-standing grievances, they would strike on a pre-designated day, "leave the trains standing just where they were, and go home."[50]

The organizer of the founding meeting and the first man to take the Trainmen's Union's oath was twenty-five-year-old Robert Adams Ammon. The son of a prosperous Pittsburgh insurance executive, he had been expelled at the age of sixteen from Capital University, in Columbus, Ohio, had served for a while with the United States cavalry as a bugler, had traveled about from China to South America, and had finally settled down as a brakeman on the Pittsburgh, Fort Wayne & Chicago Railroad. Ammon earned twenty-nine dollars a month as a brakeman, but since he had an additional income of forty dollars a month for his work in the insurance business, he was better off than most railroad workers. Still, as he explained, the fact that he had this additional income "was the only way I could live."[51]

Chosen as "grand organizer" of the new, all-encompassing railway union, and with expenses furnished by the organization, Ammon traveled over the Fort Wayne road, the Baltimore & Ohio, the Cleveland & Pittsburgh, the Lake Shore, and other lines, organizing lodges and swearing in members. By mid-June, the Trainmen's Union included thousands of trunk line railroad workers of all crafts and activities, from Baltimore to Chicago. Not only was it the first union in American history to combine all railroad workers, but it included so many engineers—the aristocrats of the industry—that Grand Chief Engineer Arthur of the Brotherhood of Locomotive

Engineers let it be known that there was nothing in the constitution or bylaws of the Brotherhood that prevented its members from also joining the Trainmen's Union.[52]

Alerted to the existence of the union by Ammon's organizing drive, the various railroad managements began discharging any of the new members whose identity they could learn from detectives and informers. On June 24, Ammon himself was discharged by the Fort Wayne management. That same day, the Trainmen's Union set June 27 at twelve o'clock as the deadline for a general railroad strike, unless the roads yielded to its demands. Delegates were immediately sent over all the different trunk lines to notify the lodges of the ultimatum and to urge them to get ready to strike.[53]

On June 25, a union committee presented formal demands to the Pittsburgh railroad officials, who refused to receive them. There was, however, another response. The five members of the committee were fired in a body, and, as if by a prepared signal, other Trainmen's Union members on various lines were handed their discharge papers. From this point on, events moved swiftly toward an almost inevitable fiasco. At a council of war in Dietrich's Hall on the evening before the strike was to take place, a split developed over the decision to walk out. Some of the men "who were the first to go into the thing" balked, "kicked up a rumpus, and it came near ending in a row," as Ammon later reported. He continued:

> . . . Two of them went out on No. 11 west, and took the news out west, that there would be no strike the next day. We were all ready on the 17th, at twelve o'clock noon, to go out on strike, but we got telegrams from everywhere asking if we were going on a strike, or whether we were not going on a strike. So the thing got mixed up, and they stopped the telegraph wires, so we couldn't get a word over. We had some trains stopped at Pittsburgh, but I had them all moved out on the track again, as I thought we had better let the thing go, than make a failure of it, and wait for some better time, with a better organization, or some time when we could get things in better shape.[54]

The "they" who stopped the telegraph wires were, of course, the railroad officials, and several of the men who balked at striking were their agents, planted in the Trainmen's Union.[55] As one student of the Great Strike points out: ". . . The combination on the part of the railroad officials to pool profits and stop the rate wars was regarded as good business, but the combination on the part of the trainmen at Pittsburgh to stop the wage reduction was regarded as a conspiracy against public interest."[56]

The men who had been sent out to notify the various lodges of the strike "beat their way back" to Pittsburgh. The Trainmen's Union remained in existence on paper, but it stopped holding meetings. Still, the grievances that had brought the railroad workers together in a unified movement remained unresolved, and the very existence of the Trainmen's Union, ineffective though it proved to be at first, revealed that the railroad men were prepared to act in one form or another to redress those grievances.

During his organizing tour for the Trainmen's Union, Ammon stopped off at Martinsburg, West Virginia, and initiated railroad men there who worked on the Baltimore & Ohio. While he was there, he heard a number of the new members vow that if President John W. Garrett of the Baltimore & Ohio, who had already cut wages 10 percent in November 1876, resorted to another wage cut rather than reduce dividends below the 10 percent the line was paying annually on its stock, the men would strike. "They talked most loud at Martinsburg, but I thought it was all wind," Ammon recalled later. "I didn't think they would strike at all."[57]

Evidently Garrett shared this view. At his suggestion, the B & O directors, at their regular meeting, decreed another 10 percent reduction in wages to take effect on Monday, July 16, for all employees earning more than a dollar a day.[58] As events soon demonstrated, both the president of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and the head of the Trainmen's Union seriously underestimated the determination of the B & O workers to resist the new wage cut.